DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 617 SO 011 026

AUTHOR Friedell, Morris
TITLE An Experiential Interpersonal Relations Course [And] Humanistic Higher Education--A Historical Sketch [And] To Grade Is To Degrade.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society (Omaha, Nebraska, April 12-15, 1978); Not available in hard copy from EDRS due to poor reproducibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Course Descriptions; Educational Needs; *Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; Educational Practice; *Grading; Higher Education; *Humanistic Education; Human Living; *Interpersonal Relationship; Literature Reviews; Open Education; *Relevance (Education); Student Centered Curriculum; Student Evaluation; Student Needs; Teaching Methods; Teaching Techniques; Ungraded Classes; *Values

ABSTRACT

The document comprises three papers which focus on humanistic education. The first paper describes a bibliography for use in a college level interpersonal relations course. Objectives of the course are to encourage students to relate to other people and to reflect upon theories of interpersonal phenomena. The second paper examines humanistic education throughout history and presents excerpts from Socrates, Thucydides, Chuang-tzu, Goethe, John Stuart Mill, and Bertrand Russell. References to Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist religious writings are included. The third paper maintains that the hypocrisy of grading can be mitigated if teachers refuse to assign grades or if they grade liberally. Among the negative effects of grading are that it is coercive, increases respect for authority rather than knowledge, discourages an intellectual atmosphere, and prevents the development of self-motivation. A bibliography accompanies each paper. (Author/DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED156617

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Morris Friedell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

An Experiential Interpersonal Relations Course [And] Humanistic Higher Education-A Historical Sketch [And] To Grade Is To Degrade.

by

Morris Friedell

1978

Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Midwest Sociological Society (Omaha, Nebraska, April 12-15, 1978)

SP 011 026

JUL 27 1978

AN EXPERIENTIAL INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS COURSE

Morris Friedell
University of California at Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA 93106
805/968-7139

Students learn interpersonal relations skills such as active listening and caring in a context of humanistic values. They are encouraged to reflect on the issues created by such learning. Among these are: (1) the obstacles to relating humanistically in everyday life and whether they can be surmounted, (2) the competing theoretical explanations of interpersonal phenomena students observe in the course, such as Maslovian and symbolic-interactionist.

To my mind, one of the chief benefits is learning to relate in a mutually caring, trusting, and understanding way with a person quite different from oneself; learning that one can form a bond with another on the basis of common humanity and shared humanistic values; and learning that ties of blood or common interest or temperament, as found in everyday life, are not ultimately necessary. Human sister- and brotherhood becomes more than an abstract ideal.

The structure is basically student centered. Egan's Face-to-Face on how to behave in an encounter group is assigned reading; students are encouraged to try it out in small leaderless groups of about eight and write a term paper on what they have learned. Once a week they all get together for lectures and discussion.

Additional structure is necessary, but I try to make it nonoppressive. Lectures and handouts get the groups going. Avoiding possible psychological casualities is discussed (though none seem to have ever occurred). It is stressed that the course is not therapeutic or remedial. Initial self-disclosure and group decision-making exercises are prescribed. I visit the groups as desired and consult extensively with individual members. Short written assignments include students' reactions to Egan (to make sure they read it promptly). An overnight retreat in the mountains is the high point of the course.

I am continuously experimenting with this course. This report somewhat reflects future plans though mostly present experience; I welcome correspondence about it.

Morris Friedell, Department of Sociology, UCSB, Santa Barbara, CA 93106

SIX STEPS FOR HUMANIZING A TEACHING (OR OTHER BUREAUCRATIC) ROLE

1) Be nonoppressive in terms of grading and requirements. Motivate by appealing to growth, rather than to deficit-needs.

2) Be truthful. E.g., be upfront about the power and social-class issues involved in the teaching situation.

3) Be self-disclosing. Share your humanness.

4) Be caring. Encourage students to try to discover what they most need and to communicate it. Be responsive.

5) Outreach. How will this teaching experience have positive impact beyond this setting?

6) Flow. Humor and orderliness ("structure") can grace the humanized class as they do the traditional one.

Bibliography

Joel Spring, A Primer of Libertarian Education.

Carl Rogers, Freedom to Learn.

John Holt, Freedom and Beyond

Jonathan Kozol, The Night is Dark and I Am Far From Home, (on humanistic hypocrisy).

Jess Lair, I ain't much, baby -- but I'm all I've got, (good on self-disclosure).

Robertston and Steele, The Halls of Yearning. Two young sociology professors have their "grand gesture" at humanistic teaching before getting fired.

Milton Mayeroff, On Caring; Pitirim Sorokin, The Ways and Power of Love. These provide philosophical and sociological foundations for the "caring" step.

Morris Friedell, "To Grade is to Degrade," (mimeo).

_____, "Humanistic Higher Education -- a Historical Sketch," (mimeo).

Humanistic Higher Education
- A Historical Sketch

Morris Friedell
Dept. of Sociology
University of California
Santa Barbara
January, 1974

According to the Faculty Handbook, a teacher here at UCSB may be legitimately concerned with "the cultivation of capacities for intelligent and significant living." I am thus concerned. In my quest for how to educate I have found the great teachers of the past inspiring. The contemporary teacher has a heritage of 2,500 years of dialogue about the nature of education, a Great Conversation, as Hutchins calls it. In this paper I will impressionistically present some historical antecedents of ideas important to me, emphasizing what I see as lasting contributions rather than vagaries of the great educators.

1) I trace several key ideas to Socrates, especially in the Apology and Theaetetus.

---Relevant Truth. Socrates was primarily interested in knowing himself ("Am I a monster more complicated and swollen with passion than the serpent Typho, or a creature of a gentler and lowlier sort, to whom Nature has given a diviner and lowlier destiny?"---Phaedrus) and knowing how to live wisely.

---Contact with human life and with nature. Socrates did not converse in a sterile and isolated classroom. Rather in the teeming marketplace or---

> Phaedrus...If I am to read, where would you please to sit?
> Socrates...Let us turn aside and go by the Ilissus; we will sit down some quiet spot.
> Phaedrus...I am fortunate in not having my sandals, and as you never have any I think that we may go along the brook and cool our feet in the water; this will be the easiest way, and at midday and in the summer is far from being unpleasant.
> Socrates...Lead on, and look out for a place in which we can sit down.
> Phaedrus...Do you see the tallest plane-tree in the distance?
> Socrates...Yes.
> Phaedrus...There are shade and gentle breezes, and grass on which we may either sit or lie down.

---Inclusion of both the personal and the political. Socrates was concerned both with statesmanship and with his subjective impressions when

death was immanent. He was aware of his emotional biases and took them into account (Phaedo).

---Affirmation of the student's capacities. Socrates exposed ignorance rather than adding knowledge. He conceived himself as midwife of the soul (Theaetetus), a faciliator as we would now say.

---A friend and colearner. Socrates did not stand above and aloof. He disclosed his personal perplexities to his students. He respected their inquiries and conclusions (Thaetetus, Parmenides).

---An example of integrity. Socrates lived and died in accordance with his beliefs.

2) Also in ancient Greece-a surprisingly contemporary theme is expressed in Thucydides "version of Pericles' funeral oration:

Joy and spontaneity---"While in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger." Just as today, humanistic education was threatened by totalitarianism.

3) Central to teaching is communication, which is much more than enunciating propositions. Emotional impact that cuts through sterile or hypocritical bullshit is important. Thus Diogenes ridiculed Plato's definition of man as a featherless biped by exhibiting a plucked chicken.

4) The process of communication must be taken into account, as Chuang-tzu recognized (Waley, 1956; orig. 3rd c. B.C.): e.g., preaching virtue may not be the best way to teach it---

"Confucious visited Lao Tzu and began talking about goodness and duty. 'Chaff from the winnower's fan,' said Lao Tzu, "can so blear our eyes that we do not know if we are looking north, south, east, or west; at heaven or at the earth. One gnat or mosquito can be more than enough to keep us awake a whole night. All this talk of goodness and duty, these perpetual pinpricks, unnerve and irritate the hearer; nothing, indeed, could be more destructive of his inner tranquility...The swan does not need a daily bath in order to remain white...."

Chuang-Tzu was also aware of how frequently ostensibly sincere discussion Ten needed to be a game of argumentation.

5) In Zen, communication became a kind of guerilla theatre (Reps, 1961): "Nan-in...received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen."

> 'Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.
>
> The professor watched the overflow until he could no longer restrain himself. 'It is overfull. No more will go in!'
>
> 'Like this cup,' Nan-in said, 'you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?'

6) Jesus combined all the above elements with humility, intimacy, and affirmation of the listener. At his best Jesus could teach through parables without putting down the student,* something extraordinarily difficult. While Socrates and Buddha proved man could be strong and control his emotions, Jesus showed he could redeem them, correlatively inverting the social order (cf. Haley, 1969).

7) If Socrates is a cultural source of reason in education, and Jesus of passion, Goethe may be taken as a source of individuality. His hero, Wilhelm Meister "receives a letter from home urging him to return in order to assume responsibility for the family business, and he replies with youthful defiance: "What good will it do me to manufacture good iron as long as my own soul is full of dross, and to put a farm in order if I am in discord with myself?" He refuses to do what is expected of him, because to acquiesce in the utilitarian function which the existing class society prescribes for him

*See Paul Watzlawick et al., Pragmatics of Human Communication, Norton 1967 for a social-psychological analysis.

would, in his opinion, dehumanize his life." (Lilge, 1948, p. 8).

8) In this tradition, Humboldt wrote, "The highest ideal... of the coexistence of human beings seems to me to consist in a union in which each strives to develop himself from his own inmost nature and for his own sake." (Lilge, 1948, p. 11).

9) Mill developed Humboldt's thought in On Liberty. They believed that individuality is not only good in itself but enriches society.

10) By the mid-19th century the three themes of the fugue--reason (objectivity), passion (subjectivity), and gratuitousness (individuality)--had been stated. Can they be harmonized in action? (Beethoven, for whom these themes roughly correspond to his three musical periods, perhaps tried to do this in his Grosse Fuge.)

11) People started building model schools-- Tolstoy (1967 ref.), Neill, Bertrand Russell, Tagore. The simple and natural joyousness of Tagore's school was influenced by the medieval Baul cult of Bengal.*

> Children are living beings--more living than grown-up people who have built shells of habit around themselves. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for their mental health and development that they should not have mere schools for their lessons, but a world whose guiding spirit is personal love. It must be an ashram where men have gathered for the highest end of life, in the peace of nature; where life is not merely meditative, but fully awake in its activities; where boys' minds are not being perpetually drilled into believing that the ideal of the idolatry of the nation is the truest ideal for them to accept; where they are bidden to realize man's world as God's Kingdom to whose citizenship they have to aspire; where the sunrise and sunset and the silent glory of stars are not daily ignored; where nature's festivites of flowers and fruit have their joyous recognition from man; and where the young and the old, the teacher and the student, sit at the same table to take their daily food and the food of their eternal life." (p. 278-9)
>
> ...The task of our education should be to realize unity in spite of [cultural differences,] to discover truth through the wilderness of

*See Rabindranath Tagore, The Religion of Man, Beacon, 1961 and Shashibhusan Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1962.

their contradictions.

> We have tried to do this in Visva-Bharati. Our endeavor has been to include this ideal of unity in all the activities in our institution, some educational, some in the shape of service to our neighbors by helping the reconstruction of village life.
>
> The children began to serve our neighbors, to help them in various ways and to be in constant touch with the life around them. They also had the freedom to grow, which is the greatest possible gift to a child. We aimed at another kind of freedom: a sympathy with all humanity, free from all racial and national prejudices." (Tagore, 1961b)

12) These experiments contributed to the recognition (foreseen by Jesus but not clearly by Socrates or Goethe) that to truly practice humanistic education was fundamentally to defy society. Krishnamurti (1964) has given this vivid contemporary expression:

> Life is really very beautiful, it is not this ugly thing that we have made of it; and you can appreciate its richness, its depth, its extraordinary loveliness only when you revolt against everything--against organized religion, against tradition, against the present rotten society--so that you as a human being find out for yourself what is true. Not to imitate but to discover--that is education, is it not? It is very easy to conform to what your society or your parents and teachers tell you. That is a safe and easy way of existing, but that is not living; because in it there is fear, decay, death. To live is to find out for yourself what is true, and you can do this only when there is freedom, when there is continuous revolution inwardly, within yourself."

13) This means that practicing humanistic education in a university is hard to do without getting fired, which is hardly surprising considering what happened to Socrates and Jesus. The question seems to be not whether but when to get fired. The best book on Humanistic College Education that I know of is Robertson and Steele's The Halls of Yearning (1969). They followed a one-year grand gesture plan for witnessing to their convictions.

> This book is the first element in that gesture. We are giving copies of this book to the students into our classes and to our colleagues at the beginning of the fall semester.
>
> We cannot, of course, take part in the grading system. We simply refuse to grade students again. We will distribute the class list to our students at the end of the semester and let them give themselves a grade if they wish.
>
> Learning should be a festival; it should be fun; it should involve emotion....

> On our opening day of class, we are playing some of our own rock music for our lecture hall classes...We are removing all of the desks and files and other bureaucratic paraphenalia from our faculty office...
>
> In our classes, we are going to talk only about those things that we feel are most relevant to our lives and to the lives of our students...
>
> We know that such action is seldom tolerated by those with the power, so we have to regard this year as our one opportunity to dramatize and practice what we believe...

---An Application. The following parable (Wiesel, 1972) will show how the above mentioned themes can be combined in a specific educational experience that changes a person's life. I feel somewhat apologetic about having picked a religious example. However, religion was the context of man's highest aspirations in the extinct culture from which the example is drawn; humanistic atheism is the contemporary equivalent (Scriven, 1966; Russell, 1957).

This is how Rabbi Yaakov-Yosseph of Polnoye found his way into the Hasidic fold:

> One morning he arrived at the Sharogorod synagogue and found it empty.
>
> "Where are the faithful?" he asked the beadle.
>
> "At the market."
>
> "All of them? At this hour, when they should be praying?"
>
> "Well, you see, there is this stranger there, telling stories. And when he speaks, one doesn't want to leave."
>
> "What impudence! Go and bring him here at once!"
>
> The beadle had no choice, he obeyed as was his duty. He ran to the market, made his way through the crowd and transmitted the order to the storyteller.
>
> "Fine," the stranger said calmly, "I am coming."
>
> The rabbi did not get up to receive him: "Who are you and how dare you divert this community from the ways of the Lord?"

"Don't get angry, said the visitor, "a rabbi like you ought never to give in to anger. Instead, listen to a story."

"What! More stories! Your insolence seems to have no limits! You'll pay for this!"

"Anger is something one must learn to control," the visitor said gently. "Listen to me..."

And there was in his voice a certain quality that troubled the rabbi and he fell silent. He could not keep himself from listening, never before had he felt such a need to listen.

"This is a story that happened to me," said the Baal Shem. "I was riding in a coach drawn by three horses, each of a different color, and not one of them was neighing. I could not understand why. Until the day we crossed a peasant on the road who shouted at me to loosen the reins. And all at once, the three horses began to neigh."

In one blinding flash the rabbi of Sharogorod understood the meaning of the parable. For the soul to vibrate and cry out, it must be freed; too many restrictions will stifle it.

And he began to cry. He cried as he had never cried before: freely, spontaneously, without apparent reason. What happened later is well known: Rebbe Yaakov-Yosseph became one of the pillars of the new movement.

Footnotes: The Baal Shem (the stranger) does his thing in the marketplace of a fairly cohesive community--like Socrates, not Jesus.

The Baal Shem tells tales rather than listens--like Jesus, not Socrates.

The Goethean or romantic note of the gratuitous, the extravagant is given by the three horses, distinguished by color rather than by function, who should not only do their job but be expressive. (Contrast Plato's black and white horses in the Phaedrus.)

The Baal Shem abdicates his position of social and intellectual superiority by learning from a peasant.

The theory of reevaluation counseling is quite pertinent for an understanding of this story (Jackins, 1970, 1965). The parable is a "discharge direction."

The intellectual content is secular, of contemporary importance, and currently the subject of intensive scholarly investigation and debate. The issue is the value of spontaneity, both in general and in the case of anger.* While this is a normative question, the concrete problems are empirical. That is, there is more concensus on where to go than on how to get there. Consistently, the insight in the story is presented as instrumental rather than as normative. It was not in question that ideally the soul should "vibrate and cry out."

---

* For annotated theoretical studies see Nathan Windman, "Aggression and Catharsis," Dept. of Sociology, UCSB, June, 1973, and Leonard Berkowitz, "The Case for Bottling-up Rage" Psychology Today, July, 1973, pp. 24-31. On the practical side see Thomas Gordon, Parent Effectiveness Training, Wyden, 1970; George Back, Aggression Lab, Kendall/Hunt, 1971; Theodore Rubin, The Angry Book, Macmillan, 1969. Each of these five contemporary viewpoints is plausible.

So much for my historical sketch. Here is a contemporary statement which perhaps legitimates humanistic education at UC Santa Barbara. (Note how these three paragraphs reflect the traditions of Goethe, Socrates and Jesus, respectively.)

"An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit"

> Education is not an absolute good, prepared and packaged for delivery in standard sizes. Our programs are, therefore, designed to appeal to more and different minds, differently prepared, coming from different milieus and bringing different expectations with them to this exciting academic community.
>
> To those who come, we offer an adventure of the mind and spirit, hoping to kindle or sustain your interest in your own self-fulfillment and to help you to develop certain habits of mind so that you may approach moral issues with respect for the complexities of reality. We expect to nourish your spirit and your creativity as well.
>
> If we can achieve these ends, perhaps you will depart with a sense of true love, compassion and humane feeling both for your fellowmen and for this university.
>
> -V. I. Cheadle, Chancellor
> (1973-1974 catalog)

But here is a more recent statement:

> These guys have tenure and they can go on talking about the Chinese dynasty of the 2nd century if they want to, but I can't afford that. The Administration can't afford that.
>
> -Alec Alexander, Vice-Chancellor
> (quoted in UCSB Daily Nexus, Sept. 26, 1973)

Which statement do you think is operative?

A Manifesto:

The action of humanistic teaching is love; the content of humanistic teachig is truth; the experience of humanistic teaching is joy.

"Love" does not mean an unnatural virtue: "...why do we so often see the virtuous so hard, tiresome and unsociable? Because they have subjected themselves to a discipline not in their nature. They are miserable, and when you are miserable yourself you make others miserable too." (Diderot, 1966, orig. 18th c.).

"Joy" does not mean comfort as opposed to challenge. It includes even "the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word." (Tagore, 1961a).

"Truth" goes below facts and theories to include intuitive and inarticulate personal knowledge; it goes beyond facts and theories to include praxis (Gandhi; Polanyi, 1958; John: 18).

But the essence of humanistic teaching is I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1970).

References and Bibliography:

Martin Buber, I and Thou, Scribners, 1970.

Denis Diderot, Rameau's Nephew, Penguin, 1966, p. 69.

Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society, Harper and Row, 1971.

Harvey Jacksin, Elementary Counselors Manual, Rational Island Publishers, 1970.

Harvey Jackins, The Human Side of Human Beings, Rational Island Publishers, Seattle, 1965.

Jay Haley, The Power Tactics of Jesus Christ, Grossman, 1969

John Holt, Freedom and Beyond, Dell, 1973.

J. Krishnamurti, Think on These Things, Harper and Row, 1964, p. 11.

References and bibliography (Continued):

Frederic Lilge, The Abuse of Learning, Macmillan, 1948.

Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Paul Reps, Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, Anchor, 1961; p. 5.

Don Robertson and Marion Steele, The Halls of Yearning, Lizard Ventures, 1969, pp. 110-111.

Carl Rogers, Freedom to Learn, Mervill, 1969.

Bertrand Russell, Why I am not a Christian, Simon and Schuster, 1957.

Michael Scriven, Primary Philosophy, McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Rabindranath Tagore, Collected Poems, Macmillan, 1961(a), p. 29.

Rabindranath Tagore, A Tagore Reader, Macmillan, 1961(b), pp. 278-9, 216.

Leo Tolstoy, On Education, U. of Chicago Press, 1967.

Arthur Waley, Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China, Anchor, 1956; p. 14.

Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire, Random House, 1972; pp. 40-41.

Morris Friedell
Department of Sociology
University of California
Santa Barbara
January 1974

To Grade is to Degrade

The case against grades is familiar, and is ably summarized in the article by Sawyer reprinted here as Appendix I, cogently presented by Robertson and Steele (1969) and supported by research in Milton (1972).

My case against grades is not so much the quantity of harm they do as the hypocrisy of the system they represent. This hypocrisy is bad. It is degrading to all involved. But the hypocrisy can be neutralized by taking a stand. People sometimes think that if they listened to their consciences they would be necessarily impelled to some extreme act. But this is not the case. Thoreau spent only one comfortable night in jail, but his civil disobedience has reechoed through history. The point was obviously not the extent of his suffering but the clarity of his disassociation from the "machine". He said, "It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but...if I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders, I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too."

So my personal stand is to grade quite liberally, thus obviating Sawyer's four criticisms considerably. This stand probably interferes with my chances for merit increases. It makes me a target of animosity among colleagues since it psychologically threatens them and since it invites collective reprisals against my Department. It creates animosity among those students who believe the abdication of power means contemptible weakness, among those who believe that nothing good is gotten without toil, and among those who believe they need a slave-driver to avoid inertia. It creates difficult (though solvable) problems of preventing anomie in the classroom.

My stand has its costs. But it also has its rewards:

> "What can I say? The class was indescribable. For the first time in my life I came into a classroom without the frustration, anxiety and pressure of grades, midterms, and finals. At first, I was a little uptight because of the unstructured situation but by the end of the course I was beginning to loosen up some of my perceptions of the whole academic bag. I am eternally grateful for your humanistic approach to people." - student, 1971.

Appendix II is an excerpt from a document by the local Committee on Educational Policy. While this document purports to examine "the purpose of grades," it simply does not mention authoritarianism, passivity, cheating, uncreativeness, or distortion of the educational process. It correctly points out that my policies depreciate the degree. Well, according to the Faculty Handbook my job is "the advancement of learning, the spread of knowledge,

and the cultivation of capacities for intelligent and significant living." It is not to maintain the degree at the expense of these.

Let me know if you have additional references or arguments on either side, or how you justify a position different from mine.

Bibliography

Don Robertson and Marion Steele, The Halls of Yearning, Andrews Printing Co., Lakewood, Ca. 1969. Two young sociology professors decide to do their thing for a year.

Jerry Farber, The Student as Nigger, Contact Books, North Hollywood, 1969. "School is where you let the dying society put its trip on you."

Howard S. Becker, et al., Making the Grade, Wiley, 1968. "Let us abandon the goal of manipulating students into doing what the faculty desires..." "...the chief obstacle to a more scholarly approach by students to their academic studies is their belief that they must give first priority to the pursuit of grades."

Howard Kirschenbaum et al., Wad-ja-get?: The grading game in American education, Hart, 1971. Mostly about high school, emphasizes implementation of liberal practices, good bibliography.

Ohmer Milton, Alternatives to the Traditional, Jossey-Bass, 1972. Nice summary of research in a chapter called "Symbol Scramble."

Professor X, This Beats Working for a Living, Arlington, 1973. A self-confessed coward anonymously advocates traditional grading practices. He says, "Some young professors think the way to popularity with students is to give out good grades wholesale. And their classes will be filled if they do so--but with students who have only contempt for them." No references.

Charles Muscatine et al., Education at Berkeley: "The Muscatine Report", U of C Press, 1968. Background for local grading policies. Some interesting anecdotes and statistics.

Daily Northwestern
Magazine
No. 44
February 25, 1970

Emphasis

The case against grades

by Jack Sawyer

Associate Psychology Prof. Jack Sawyer was one of three Northwestern instructors who ran into administrative opposition earlier this quarter after announcing to his class that grades would be non-contingent. Sawyer opposed the present system of grading and wrote about it for this issue.

The ill effects of the grading system are well-known. It restricts students' freedom, fosters a cynical, anti-intellectual atmosphere, forces students to pursue grades before learning, and impedes development of independent learning and creativity. It is presumed necessary to provide needed certification of competance, give feedback to students on their progress, provide incentive to learn that would otherwise be lacking, and furnish a reward to those who do learn.

Examination of these presumed functions shows that they are largely unnecessary, attainable by other means, or not met by grades anyway. Any remaining positive functions are simply not worth the toll that grading exacts upon learning. To preserve this prime function of universities, the grading system must be abolished. Whatever problems this may create will be less than the violence that grades now do to learning.

ILL EFFECTS OF GRADING:

1. Grading restricts the freedoms of students, encourages respect for authority rather than knowledge, and suppresses development of the ability to make independent assessments.

The grading system imposes external constraints sometimes thought to promote learning, but learning should depend upon individual motivation, not imposed conditions. Students should be free to determine their own education. If a person wants to learn something, then it is unnecessary to employ grades to motivate him. If he does not so choose, then it is oppressive to require him. The use of grades causes the authorities who impose them to be respected (or resented) for their power rather than their knowledge.

The coercive aspects of the educational system may well carry over into other areas of life, promoting a norm of blind obedience to authority, and inhibiting development of the ability of individuals to choose independently. If college students are thought incapable of acting wisely, when are they capable of choosing? Unfortunately, 16 or more years in which what is right is defined by what the teacher says prepares persons poorly for later independent choice, as the reluctance of adults to make independent assessment of events in the world around them indicates.

2. Grading discourages an open, intellectual atmosphere, promotes deviousness and cynicism, and damages relations among students and teachers.

Free pursuit of knowledge requires an atmostphere where everyone is free to voice opinions, doubts, uncertainties, ignorance, and even error. But the requirement of evaluation forces students to consider the possible effect of exposing their ignorance. It also means that teachers can never be quite sure that a student is interested in the subject rather than in improving his grade.

The necessity to grade forces a game, with opposing roles, upon students, faculty, and administrators. The game invites duplicity by all involved in the process. The resulting deviousness, and its widespread toleration, involves the university in a duplicity that is highly inconsistent with its professed goals of promoting truth and clarity. Grading also forces students into competition with each other and inhibits their developing the ability to learn from one another.

3. Grading forces both students and instructor to orient their course activity around this requiremtn, restricts the range of activities, and defines learning by this restricted range.

Since students' fate in college and afterward may depend upon grades, they must necessarily first work to assure that they will "succeed." Thus the first task is to learn how to get grades adequate for their purpose. Under the grading system, students rightly ask whether lecture material will be on the examination, what form the examination will take, how much each course component weighs in the final grade, etc. Grading creates just what faculty decry and students resent--the necessity to be oriented toward grades.

In attempts to be fair, instructors may carefully limit and prescribe course material in ways they would not if free of the need for comparative evaluation. Students necessarily select projects on the basis of the amount of effort and the probability of success. It becomes better to deal successfully with trivial problems than to tackle challenging problems on which one might fail, and this attitude carries over to other situations. Materials and modes best suited for rapid regurgitation are favored; cramming and other practices inimical to learning are encouraged. Worst of all, grade-defined success in a course tends to reify as "learning" whatever was done to get it.

4. Grading discourages more independent, creative activity, prevents the development of self-motivation, and denies the opportunity to learn how to learn.

The necessity to meet standard requirements deters students from pursuing knowledge independently and creatively. The imposition of external incentives effectively eliminates the opportunity for internal motivation to develop and be used. It cheats students of what could otherwise be an excellent opportunity--perhaps the last good chance--to learn how to learn. Yet the rate of change of society makes it increasingly more important to be able to learn rather than to know any specific, soon-outmoded information.

How will mechanically-educated persons cope with the society of the year 2000? Significant new knowledge itself will be better fostered by those who have learned how to learn creatively--whatever volume of information might be

ground out more mechanically. Universities that do not encourage persons to learn freely seem unlikely to provide significant help in the important aspects of people's lives, nor to create a society of free, unalienated people.

THE PRESUMED FUNCTIONS OF GRADING:

1. Certification. As measures of performance, grades are inaccurate, fail to predict future performance outside school, and are not needed by other institutions anyway.

Grades are invariably based upon incomplete samples of the relevant knowledge; the samples are moreover necessarily biased in both content and form of evaluation. Grading practices reflect personal differences in teaching philosophy and vary widely among instructors, as do average grades given. These and other shortcomings make the transcript a dubious document. Businesses realize this and do not place too much reliance on it, usually insisting, as graduate schools do not, upon personal interviews.

Undergraduate grades do predict graduate school grades to a limited extent, but neither graduate nor undergraduate grades have been shown consistently to predict performance outside school.

The use of grades for entrance to graduate and professional schools has been considered the major impediment to the abolition of grades. However, there are other ways--such as examination of actual products from students--to accomplish selection. The market value to a student of a certificate is perhaps a more relevant consideration than one would like to think, but it is a questionable concern for a university, particularly if this marketable certificate interferes with learning, so that producing certified graduates diminishes the learning that is supposed to be certified.

2. Feedback: Students need to know how they are doing, but this is not aided by merely an A-F grade, and requires instead information that is much more substantive, detailed, and frequent, and which can come from sources other than the instructor.

Feedback is crucial to learning, but the grading system inhibits rather than facilitates it. Feedback is more freely given, received, and utilized in an atmosphere free of coercive evaluation. Grading encourages seeking of feedback for reasons irrelevant to learning; students may ask instructors to explain a low grade not to correct misinformation, but to justify the grade. They may also fail to seek feedback simply to avoid this unfavorable impression. Grading establishes the instructor, even against his will, as the final and only arbiter of what is right and wrong, important and unimportant. Those who accept this are hoodwinked, those who do not but conform become cynical and those who resist subject themselves to sanctions.

Grading generally encourages students to look for feedback solely from the instructor, not from fellow students, from other sources, or from their own knowledge. It is poor preparation for future independent learning, and tends to create either lack of ability to discriminate at all, or application of fixed standards.

3. Incentive: If some students learn only because of the incentive of grades, and would not learn otherwise, one should question the value of what they learn, whether they are enabled ever to learn on their own, and perhaps why they should be doing something they don't want to.

Material learned only for the sake of getting a grade seems unlikely to be either esteemed or retained. Though forced learning may be at its dubious best in situations of rote learning for short-term recall, it seems unlikely that creativity and intellectual honesty can be motivated by externally imposed sanctions. In any event, forced grades are alienating; they get persons to do something they don't want to, and involve the university in furthering alienation. It would be far better to question whether the university needs to provide certificates that are sought for the sake of certification alone and are destructive of learning itself.

4. Reward: Those who have truly learned are rewarded both intrinsically and through the use of what they have learned.

This reward is a natural consequence, and it can neither be bestowed or removed. Grades and certificates, in contrast, are not valuable in themselves, but only by reputation. They are most needed when the intrinsic reward is lacking; grades and certificates are more useful to those who have not received the real reward of learning. But for what are they rewarded then? For whatever conbination of compliance and cleverness it took to complete the requirements of the system. The power to bestow these arbitrary rewards increases the power of the university, both in society and over its members, but does it further learning?

GRADING MUST BE ABOLISHED

It is apparent that the process of grading tends to destroy what it attempts to measure. The ill effects are all too evident. It is coming to be recognized that the grading system cannot be salvaged--that there is a basic incompatibility between grading and learning. Effort should be devoted not to vain attempts at salvage, but instead to exploration of new and better ways of education. Freedom from grading may not promote the aims of those--at any level in the university--who see the university primarily as a certifying institution, but it will help those whose concern is learning. The question at stake is what the university is all about, and whose interests it serves.

Appendix II

Committee on Educational Policy report to the Santa Barbara Division of the UC Academic Senate - January 28, 1971.

It should be noted that grades have a number of highly useful purposes:

1. To let the student know how well or poorly he is doing, for his own information.

2. To let the instructor know the same, so he can decide whether the student is excellent, or average, or should repeat the course, or try something else.

3. To indicate to the instructor how successfully or unsuccessfully he is accomplishing his purposes as a teacher.

4. To show all concerned whether the student is making normal progress towards a degree.

5. To provide a basis for honors at graduation, including Phi Beta Kappa and other honorary societies.

6. To show eligibility for admission to graduate and professional schools and for fellowships and other graduate aid.

Thus grades serve both for evaluation of past achievement and prediction of future achievements.

Now if such a system of discriminating letter grades is used, its effectiveness seems to depend on the fact that the application of grades reflects real differences in the accomplishments of members of a given class. Students, naturally, like to get good grades. This desire is meaningful only so long as grades are reasonably good indices of the quality of achievement; a good grade is a reward for, and a recognition of, high achievement. If the grading standards are changing so that increasingly high grades are given for the same level of achievement, the margin for reward and recognition is dwindling, and a high grade is worth less and less. If everybody in the class gets an A, what does my A mean? Eventually, nobody's grades mean anything. The most serious consequence of this depreciation of the currency is that, because of the relationship between grades and degrees, eventually nobody's degree from any institution that follows this path will mean anything either.